

FIELD



Zoologischer Garten Zürich
Schimpansen beim Frühstück

Can improve: There are three
most experts of Zurich. There
are the others, Parker and
Lauras. Parker is in the
middle and the middle the most
reliable with his son. There is a
little bit and the can part away
2 sprouting to the others' one.
But there is on the left the
son is for some and with the
others in the living room on the
corner and the others are there.



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Master S. Joyce

17 Villa Scheffer

Pari's XVI

Zürich

FIELD

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CONTENTS

<i>Stanley Plumly</i>	5	<i>Peppergrass</i>
	6	<i>For Esther</i>
<i>Alfonsina Storni</i>	10	<i>They've Come</i>
<i>Jan Haagensen</i>	11	<i>Yard Tree</i>
	12	<i>Ridden Fields</i>
	13	<i>Brought</i>
	14	<i>Mansion Sites</i>
<i>Lance Patigian</i>	16	<i>Killing Roosters</i>
	19	<i>Out on Kearney Boulevard</i>
<i>Marvin Bell</i>	21	<i>How We Think Back</i>
	27	<i>Gemwood</i>
<i>X. J. Kennedy</i>	29	<i>On "Consumer's Report"</i>
	32	<i>Consumer's Report</i>
<i>Thomas Lux</i>	33	<i>Most of My Disembarkments</i>
	34	<i>Man Asleep in the Desert</i>
	35	<i>Past Tense</i>
	36	<i>The Angel's Teethmarks</i>
	37	<i>Dance and Swim</i>
	38	<i>Barrett and Browning</i>
	39	<i>Here's to Samuel Greenberg</i>
<i>Juan Ramon Jiménez</i>	40	<i>Poe's House</i>
<i>Marilyn Johnson</i>	41	<i>Joseph</i>
<i>Timothy Kelly</i>	43	<i>Babe Ruth Pointing</i>
<i>Dennis Schmitz</i>	44	<i>The Man Who Buys Hides</i>
<i>Richard Kent</i>	48	<i>Hillside Night-Shed</i>
<i>Laura Jensen</i>	51	<i>Tapwater</i>
	52	<i>House is an Enigma</i>
	53	<i>The Candles Draw Well After All</i>
<i>Eugenio Montale</i>	54	<i>The Day of the Dead</i>
	55	<i>"I lived on the third floor in those days"</i>
<i>Mark Jarman</i>	56	<i>Dead Reckoning</i>
	57	<i>False Subjects</i>

<i>Jean Follain</i>	58	<i>Meanings of Poetry</i>
	62	<i>One and the Same</i>
	62	<i>Funeral Processions</i>
	63	<i>Color of Sepia</i>
	63	<i>Moment of a World</i>
	64	<i>In a Downpour</i>
	64	<i>The Pose</i>
	65	<i>The Ocean</i>
	65	<i>Obscure Transparency</i>
	66	<i>Toy</i>
<i>William Stafford</i>	67	<i>Looking For You</i>
	68	<i>Miracles</i>
<i>Karl Krolow</i>	69	<i>No Time To Lose</i>
	70	<i>When Things Turn Green</i>
<i>Reg Saner</i>	71	<i>Homing</i>
	74	<i>Talking Back: A Dream</i>
	75	<i>A Blue Glass Jar</i>
<i>Blanca Varela</i>	76	<i>Madonna</i>
<i>Galway Kinnell</i>	77	<i>Looking at Your Face</i>
	77	<i>The Hen Brooding</i>
<i>Chase Twichell</i>	78	<i>The Chemist and His Daughter</i>
	79	<i>Contributors</i>

PEPPERGRASS

Nothing you could know, or name, or say
in your sleep, nothing you'd remember,
poor-man's-pepper, wildflower, weed—
what the guidebook calls *the side*
of the road — as from the moon the earth
looks beautifully anonymous, this field
pennycress, this shepherd's purse, nothing
you could see: summer nights we'd look up
at the dark, the stars, and turn like toys . . .

Nothing you could hold on to
but the wet grass, cold as morning.

We were windmills where the wind came from,
nothing, nothing you could name,
blowing the lights out, one by one.

FOR ESTHER

1

From the back it looks like a porch,
portable, the filigree railing French.

And Truman, Bess and the girl each come out waving, in short sleeves, because the heat is worse than Washington.

The day is twelve hours old, Truman is talking.
You tell me to pay attention,
so I have my ball-
cap in my hands when he gets to the part that the sun
is suicidal, his dry voice barely audible above the train.

It makes a noise like steam.
He says, he says, he says.

His glasses silver in the sun. He says
there is never enough, and leans down to us.

2

Shultz and I put pennies on the track to make the train jump. It jumps.

Afternoons you nap — one long pull of the body
through the heat.

I go down to the depot
against orders; it's practically abandoned
except for the guy who hangs out

the mail and looks for pennies. He's president

of this place, he says. We pepper his B & O
brick building with tar balls when he's gone.

You hate the heat and sleep and let
your full voice go when I get caught.

You can't stand my noise or silence.
And I can hear a train in each bent coin.

You're thirty. I still seem to burden that young body.

3

Light bar, dark bar, all the way down. The trick is
if a train comes there is room for only the river.

I look down between the crossties at the Great Miami.
Three miles back, near home,

Kessler has already climbed to his station.
The trick is waiting for the whistle.

I remember
your dream about bridges: how, as a child, they shook
you off, something the wind compelled.

You woke up holding on. And now this August morning

I don't know enough to be afraid or care.
I do my thinking here,

looking down at the long ladder on the water,
forty feet below.

The engine at idle, coasting in the yard, the call bell
back and forth, back and forth above the lull . . .

I hang on like the mail as the cars lock in
to one another, couple, and make a train.

The time I break my arm you swear
me to the ground — no more rivers,
no more side-car rides —

and stay up half

the night to rub my legs to sleep.

Sometimes you talk as if Roosevelt

were still alive. Recovery is memory.
I never broke my arm.

Back and forth. The names

of the states pass every day in front of us, single-file.

If a house were straw there'd be a wind,
if a house were wood there'd be a fire,

if a house were brick there'd be a track
and a train to tell the time.

I wish each passage

well — wind, fire, time, people on a train.
From here to there, three minutes, whistle-stop.

And the speech each night, the seconds clicking off.

The whole house shakes — or seems to. At intervals,
the ghost smoke fills

all the windows on the close-in side.

It's our weather. It's what we hear all night,
between Troy and anywhere, what you meant

to tell me, out of the body, out of the body travel.

THEY'VE COME

Today my mother and my sister
have come to see me.

For some time I'd been alone
with my verses, my pride; in short, nothing.

My sister, the older one, has grown up,
still slight and fair; the first dream passes
through her eyes. I've said to the little one:
"Life is sweet. What's bad goes away . . . "

My mother smiles, as those who know souls
are accustomed to smile.
She puts her two hands on my shoulders,
she looks at me very steadily . . .
I burst into tears.

We've eaten together, in the most
lived-in room of the house.
A springlike sky . . . All the windows were open
so we could see it.

And as we talk, we tranquil women,
of so many old and forgotten things,
my sister, the little one, interrupts:
"The swallows are passing . . . "

translated by Martha Moody

YARD TREE

Yard tree with the last of its leaves
blazing, like a dogfight
that lit down, in a wind,

makes away with worlds
where you were come after,
were called in from the fields

faintly many times
as if by sisters
that you leave home

when it is still dark;
your sisters, asleep
like worlds not yet light.

RIDDEN FIELDS

Fields that stamp down, ridden fields
that weigh like horse spit on the wind,
are fields that stun, fields that fly
off like mud hawks, the dust slung

five lives away
and never watered or cut,
the shimmer of it intense
as a dirt-kicking attendant,

nervous, who doesn't watch
an open gas pump
as if it were weighing on him
like a blank mental patient

from whom a bored guard steals away,
saying to himself, *every* and *ever*
(*went ever which way*)
as if they were the same word

or would be if they never
were pronounced dead to the world
like the ex-catatonic,
the mental patient in shock,

a demoted walker of hots
who once was a morning rider,
could no longer make his weight
and went into the drunk ward;

who, for five years,
drank rubbing alcohol,
survived without liniment for soreness
and ran out of cleansing fluid

like the station attendant
on an island, who hand-wipes the windshields,
spit-polishing a corner,
with a sleeve torn to keep down the dust.

BROUGHT

All that is brought off
this or that field is flung prone
like them or hauled in
piece by piece
when the field falls;

that cut field down as far
as morning stratus clouds
or a bought steamfitter
at work on a twenty-two foot
lap-strake wreck

done for in a field,
a grease-shop for the foundered,
from there to here
like a cloud formation
above fields fed to the stranded

forty acres that belong
to an unskilled piece worker
with his day's haul in the field
as out of the way as a cloud
or an accident

in which nobody
died or bought his time
in the world where the light
flung forty acres
for the founderer
who figure-spit

at a grease fire,
in a burning cloud
like a radiator fitter,
a scalded survivor of mist,
of radiance won as it steams
like the day's haul in the field.

MANSION SITES

Bareheaded in the fifty-goat field
milk-laden as the hen-hawks
hunting for horses,
you take your pick of mansion sites

whose hunters broke a leg
in their rapt concentration
or in fierce-looking flight
when the farmer, with five hen-hawks,

broke and rushed them with the shoulder action
of someone who never drove in third gear
and whose hunting hawks could kill a horse,
wing-muscles as tranquil-faced

and as open as the field
where hunters fan out with the hawk
that in spring training
never hit anything a lick
and flung free like a muscular faced

farmer in the state mental hospital
who drove a school bus for a year
and in the field ran a diesel
as hair-raising as a burst of hail
or a blood donor in a bar,

whose shoulders heave
like someone up to his neck
in exhaust fumes, whose heart works harder
than an opener of a racetrack

or a gas station with no lights,
an attendant
in the bleachers with women
who at the hawk-throne of the track
hunt the horse with wing muscle.

KILLING ROOSTERS

When I found out
babies are tough
and the future every bit
as corny as the past, it seemed
just
that she should drop a battery
on the sickly one. She climbed
a chair, aimed,
and the battery wept
for a short time
and it was over.
It falls to me
to kill the rest.
There are too many here, they are too good
looking and live long lives.

If you make soup with a rooster
it tastes like metal.
If you burn them,
they burn resolutely
and hot
like phosphorous,
denting the earth.
If you take them away,
the hens
walk backwards
into the wind
until they are infected
and irresponsible.

In the early evening
the roosters
queue-up
on the pickets
and enter the Chinaberry tree.
In dreams I've slept in trees
and even hands.
I have captured bright colored dogs
in the foothills
and gotten drunk
with the tattoo man.
I've never known a pimp
but I can see them
climbing up
into the old trees of West Fresno
in my imagination.
This is either here or there,
but a policeman
never looks in the taciturn elms
and mulberries
except to follow a smoke ring, and
even then,
fails to see the
iridescence.

—

10 years old
I celebrated the
Royal Canadian Mounted Force
at the fairground arena.
The drill master
held a leather switch
to his heart, and later,
everyone in civvies,

the horses being solemnly loaded,
he strutted among the young girls,
explaining the medals
and the mandate
of the Queen.
Down the midway
Ohio Wonder Belly was eating a car.
"Tombstone disposition, graveyard mind
and tinsnips"

And I know he was his momma's toddler
with something soft and strained
on his lips once.

Uncle Forbes said Bethlehem Steel
was making fools
of men.

There is an old rule:
There shall be but one fire
for ten loaves —
that fire is fought with fire
and it is bilious
and cocky as an extra rooster.

I don't believe this
any more than you do.
But I have some killing to do
nevertheless.
These birds have bright red combs
and black and green tails.
In between, a pale, pale yellow
like nothing on earth.

OUT ON KEARNEY BOULEVARD

Alright,
rain blisters the old Hornet
in the yard.
The chickens that aren't lost
unravel in the wheelwells
for the time being.
I remember the psalm
in which
a woman fetches her man from the field,
and amidst the rocketry of water,
they embrace,
and elegantly turn toward home.
But sometimes love is so hard here,
it has to be carved into a tree.

At night you hear the fields percolating
and the nervous tappets
of Mexican trucks, and the ditchtender
in his gaudy shirt
goading furrows
in the broomcorn.

During the thirties
the touring car club from Los Angeles
used this road. Long sunny phaetons
parked at the fruitstand.
The marvelous acumen of the posts
in the young orchards. The renegade eucalyptus
from the coast of Yugoslavia.
Very little is lost on the rich.
That is a saying here.

The neighbor woman is squirting off
six pairs of galoshes on the lawn.
She needs a cane and cannot light the oven anymore.

Says there's a single adder on the moon,
lives there all by himself
tracing little bitty lines in the powder.
Do I know what she means?

—

Alright, last night,
the last chalice overturned,
the pig growing antsy in the short pull
of his pen,
I walked onto the boulevard.
And slaloming the palms,
hallucinated the Arcade of the Lost Aptitude,
and drifted among the stubby oleanders,
anoointed pallets, feathers,
rusted awls . . .
The poor have winched in all the choice old cars.
Tomorrow it rains on them again
and they are restored.

(Editor's note: The two essays and accompanying poems which follow, by Marvin Bell and X. J. Kennedy, are excerpted from the forthcoming anthology, Poetry As Process: Ask the Poet, edited by Alberta Turner and published by David McKay, Inc. The anthology is a collection of fifty contemporary poems, analyzed by their authors, in answer to questions concerning the way the poems began, the forms they took, and the principles by which they were written and revised.)

HOW WE THINK BACK

In answering your questions about the origin and evolution of a poem, I have chosen for example a poem which is itself an attempt to follow the mind and emotions backwards, then forwards beyond the present.

The circumstance was this. I keep in a workroom out back — one room under a wild cherry tree — a xerox of my youngest son's hands. Four years earlier, showing him the operations of a Xerox copier, I had had him place his hands — he was five — on the machine. It was just a way of demonstrating the workings of the copier, but I could not throw away the print that resulted. It would always make me sad to look at it.

At five, a child's hands are still fatty with innocence. The xerox showed the innocence, and nothing of experience or the particular: not the fingerprints, for example. I knew this was the obvious reason the print could sadden me.

Still, that shy totem would not have shown up in a poem had not it insisted upon itself, four years later, in a moment when I thought I was thinking about something else.

I had passed through O'Hare Airport in Chicago for the umpteenth time. O'Hare, I'm told, is the world's busiest airport. It is also the one which provides the least to do between planes. Because I live in Iowa City, and must fly to Cedar Rapids to reach home, I often face a long layover in Chicago. Therefore, I have developed a routine with which to pass the time.

Following my routine, I had seen a new item in the gift shop: "gemwood." I disliked the idea at once: "gemwood" is produced by force-feeding pine trees with dyes, as if the wood of a tree were not enough in itself. The result is a batch of wooden eyes, hung row upon row. "Gemwood" seemed to me an example of one unfortunate meaning of "art" in our time: violation of the natural.

Well, I began with "gemwood." Something of a catty description of "gemwood" was all I intended. That would suffice to refuse it. But the print of Jason's hands looked up at me once more.

What sadness! There was much behind it. That print of a child's hands had been made the summer we had gone to Vermont so that I could teach for Goddard College — the summer my older son's unlikely first pet, a rat, had died unnecessarily.

Now you reading this will probably think a rat a ludicrous pet, and you will almost surely — if your defenses are up — think it silly to feel deeply the death of a rodent. Well, what *did* make us terribly sad, even weepy? Was it the death of the rat, the pain of our son's sudden loss, or both? Does it matter that we know?

I think not. Rather, it matters that we feel. And acknowledge that we do. Writing in my little study, it was enough to acknowledge one's own backyard.

But of course there were other thoughts and impulses that surfaced. I wondered at the cause of my sadness, but also at the way we think from one matter to another. For a year, the poem was titled, *How We Think Back*. Furthermore, the "joint effort of man and nature" (the phrase used to advertise gemwood) signalled to me also the inevitable *difference* between man and nature. So too, the past and present came together, as did sadness and joy.

Thus, the poem began, as do so many, because there was present a strong emotion (sadness), tempered and shaped by my attention to occasions and objects. And surely there were general concerns at the time which encouraged the particular

combination. For example, I had wanted to write sensible poems to my sons. I was aware that the parent learns too late. I had tried to be a good parent, and I was trying to get better.

One has the literal fact ("gemwood") and the sense that there is more to say, connections to be allowed to surface — not simply to be planned or designed. That is why the poem wanders about, gives and takes back. Its movement is a kind of "hesitation forward."

You ask next about revisions. I remember carrying a draft of the poem — at first, yellow sheets; later, ironically, a xerox of a draft — on trips, finally all the way to Europe. I let it lie, awaiting a clearer perspective. I didn't want to make the poem too shapely. Partly, this was because I had come to desire another sort of movement than my previous poems had shown; but it was also because I wanted the poem to speak as the objects and occasions had spoken to me: haltingly, correctingly, without a posed moment to make famous.

The poem was not to be called "finished" until a year after it had begun. I know now that my practice has been to let drafts sit quite some time, even years, and to publish finished poems long after they are written. Sometimes, my method of revision may be more of a method for acceptance (and then completion) than for making major alterations. I wait to be able to accept as much as possible of the poem-in-process: to understand the underlying terms of the poem, the givens, and to make the connections thereby required. In the case of *Gemwood*, the poem did not change size significantly from what I had been able to manage during those first days when I had written most of it. I removed one line and added two. Beyond that, I made changes in the service of rhythm, sequencing, emphasis and small clarities. I may have made a change or two in what I took to be dull language.

You inquire, too, about conscious principles of technique. That is, perhaps, the most difficult question you have asked, because almost any answer must remain partial and misleading. I could say that my technique in this poem — and in the poems which were to follow, in some sense, from it — has

been to be as much of myself as possible, but without any insistence. This may be a question of tone, which subsumes all technical matters. I wished, as I have already said, to allow the poem to wander with the mind — not without direction, but without preemptive designing. I wished to be colloquial, and to avoid specially “poetic” diction but not abstract words. I wished to write the poem so that it could be read without reference to another text. I trusted my ear, and tried to phrase the sentences, and line the poem, so that it would be graceful, clear and engaging — but not so smooth that it might become a static record of the mind more than it would be an embodiment of process to be participated in anew with each rereading.

Could another writer line the poem differently? Perhaps. Not, however (I hope), without changing it, if subtly. It seems to me that the first few lines of a poem create a relationship between line and syntax, and that the phrasing and lineation which follow necessarily derive from those first lines.

Notice the little transitions between stanzas. The subject matter of the poem changes slightly with each new stanza; with each new stanza, the poem takes a step forward. Yet I was reluctant to permit neat breaks in what was a flow of association, memory and thought. One theme of the poem may be that very flow.

The ending I hope for is the inevitable, earned one. The ending here is not too surprising, but it is also not a simple repetition of all that has gone before. Hopefully, it is the next step, containing all the rest but requiring nothing more.

I prefer the poem to be read silently or aloud, but not with musical accompaniment, though perhaps someone could convince me I was wrong about that. Finally, the eye requires what the mind requires: a helpful relationship between content and style.

And you ask a fearless question as to who I think are my readers. I visualize them as myself, my sons, other parents and sons, and then thoughtful people at large. Rereading is desired. After all, anyone can understand this poem. Any-

one can read it and, were we a nation of readers, anyone might.

You ask for an attempt at paraphrase. I prefer to try it on a level more general than that of the poem itself. First, the poem by its very method suggests that association and memory are not always random, perhaps never are. To the contrary, they uncover conscious thoughts and feelings. By its content, the poem suggests (to me) that life is loss; that parenthood includes the inevitability of one's own loss as well as the watching of that sense of life-as-loss arrive in the children; furthermore, that man and nature must be thought opposed unless their "joint effort" is seen to be one of change, aging and death, as well as of birth.

Such a paraphrase is incomplete in itself in general terms and, specifically, omits the naming, the relationships of events and people, the little telling moves (for example, the one correcting our usual impression of a rat as a pet), and the way in which the feelings are shown to persist through changes of time and place. Of course, the paraphrase also leaves out the music, the language, the organization, and the pacing of line and phrase and stanza. Used improperly, the paraphrase allows us to avoid the poem altogether. In fact, this is the most common use of paraphrase. The paraphrase kit comes with thick gloves, a blindfold, a gag and four corks.

How much do I want to tell you about how this poem seems to differ from my earlier poems in quality, theme and technique? You have asked, but our parents told us, "Comparisons are odious." However, my father used to say, about anyone, "He has to make a living too." Therefore, I'll try.

Quality. This poem is as good as many of my poems, better than many, not so good as a few — I think. However, it is as *qualified* as any, which may be what counts.

Theme. The fallibility of the parent, the inevitability of the loss of the parent — these themes have been present elsewhere in my poetry, though not before in the context of these circumstances.

Technique. The poem reads differently from my previous

poems. It signals what I hope to be development rather than mere change, and I recognize that it is nowise the poem of metaphysical convolutions I have often written. It is a metaphysical poem, to be sure. For myself, I believe the term *metaphysical* applies to any poem I might want to reread. But this poem takes a different path toward its substance, and walks differently all the way. Compared to many of my earlier poems, it is less neat, less "difficult" or dense, more halting, more sentimental, perhaps more humane.

I told my students that I felt I would be a beginner until about the age of forty. I wrote *Gemwood* in 1975, at thirty-seven, and it signals something near a beginning I now see to have been inevitable yet to have depended on the poems which preceded it — a beginning which would not be rushed. That is why I am specially fond of this little ragged piece of saying, maybe a poem.

GEMWOOD

to Nathan and Jason, our sons

In the *shoppes*
they're showing "gemwood":
the buffed-up flakes of dye-fed pines —
bright concentrics or bull's-eyes,
wide-eyed on the rack of
this newest "joint effort
of man and nature." But then

those life-lines circling
each target chip of "gemwood"
look less like eyes, yours or mine,
when we have watched a while.
They are more like the whorls
at the tips of our fingers,
which no one can copy. Even on

the photocopy Jason made of
his upraised hands, palms down
to the machine, they do not appear.
His hands at five-years-old —
why did we want to copy them, and
why does the grey yet clear print
make me sad? That summer,

the Mad River followed us
through Vermont — a lusher state than
our own. A thunderous matinee
of late snows, and then the peak
at Camel's Hump was bleached.
As a yellow pear is to the sky —
that was our feeling. We had with us

a rat from the lab — no, a pet
we'd named, a pure friend who changed
our minds. When it rained near
the whole of the summer, in that
cabin Nathan made her a social creature.
She was all our diversion, and brave.
That's why, when she died

in the heat of our car
one accidental day we didn't intend,
it hurt her master first and most,
being his first loss like that,
and the rest of our family felt badly
even to tears, for a heart that small.
We buried her by the road

in the Adirondack Mountains,
and kept our way to Iowa.
Now it seems to me the heart
must enlarge to hold the losses
we have ahead of us. I hold to
a certain sadness the way others
search for joy, though I like joy.

Home, sunlight cleared the air
and all the green's of consequence. Still
when it ends, we won't remember
that it ended. If parents must receive
the sobbing, that is nothing
when put next to the last crucial fact
of who is doing the crying.

ON "CONSUMER'S REPORT"

Let me quote a remarkable statement by a poet on the subject of his working habits. Wordsworth made it to Alexander Dyce, who put it into his *Reminiscences*: "When I compose a poem I generally begin with the most striking and prominent part; and if I feel pleased with my execution of that, I then proceed to fill up the other parts."

The apparent drabness of that account of the poetic process, the seeming crassness of proceeding "to fill up the other parts," invites misinterpretation of Wordsworth's statement. It is a familiar received idea of people who detest stanzas and rime-schemes that the form of a formal poem is a boring old jug that formal poets fill with any old guck they have handy. But Wordsworth (if I read him right) isn't talking about form. (Is it necessary, any more, to refute that familiar received idea? Whether the form of a poem be open or closed, a poem isn't usually written in order to pad it out. To try to do so would be like trying to fall in love only with someone who conformed to a particular chest measurement.)

Wordsworth refers, I believe, to the fact that poems tend to enter the world by their most astonishing parts; and that often it is for the sake of such first-given, unlabored lines that a poet bothers to finish writing poems to contain them. In order to deliver the rest of the poem, the poet may have to bear down on it. For a prominent moment can't stand alone, if its poem is much longer than a haiku. Such a moment usually has to be led up to, or down from. Evidently, the rest of the poem won't be so splendid, so intense. In a way, that's an advantage: there would be no prominent moments in a poem whose every part were equally prominent. (We can except that handful of sublime lyrics that are, miraculously, intense throughout: Blake's "Tyger", Hopkins's "Windhover".)

To Wordsworth's statement I'd add a small *me too*. "Consumer's Report," which happens to be a formal poem, was a breech birth: the first thing to protrude was its bottom stanza. Then I had to urge forth the rest of it. That last stanza seems

quite the best of the four — the most lively with hints, the most readily speakable. If you ask me, the first and second stanzas aren't anything special — just workaday poetry — but they're necessary because they prepare for stanzas three and four. (There can be poems, of course, that begin magnificently and then fall off in intensity:

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go . . .

Obviously those lines dawned first, and then Donne had to fill up the other parts.)

Unlike most poems I write, that are rewritten more than they are written, this one emerged in very much the way it now remains. That last stanza arrived one morning while I was lying in bed. Later, out in the back yard as I was picking up fallen branches, more lines insisted. I composed the first three stanzas sitting on a pile of brush, then had to go indoors to fix them in writing. (I can hold about twenty unwritten lines in my head before the damned thing spills. They stay there because their rimes, meter, and stanza help keep them together. That's one advantage to writing old-fangled formal poetry like my stuff — for a first draft, you don't need paper.)

Strongly impelled and yet loosely defined: that's an emerging poem — like a burst of buckshot. What brought about that final stanza to begin with? An urgent memory from the days when I was a kid during the National Recovery Act. Among many jobless people who took to selling home-made products from door to door, John Dowd stands out for me. (There were people selling home-hooked rugs, fish for your cat, hard candy — and if you too were hard up for cash, you could barter with them -- as my mother does in the poem, swapping an outgrown snowsuit for some horse radish.) In life, his name was Jones, but I changed that for fear the reader would think I invented it. Turning Jones into Dowd may have been suggested, too, by the stock market crash that triggered that depression: a fall in the Dow-Jones averages.

Now, Dowd/Jones's thing was home-made horse radish so fierce, so reeking, so pure that in time he went blind from making it. Perhaps he was a fool — still, I admire his integrity. In a sense, John Dowd was the ideal poet whom all of us yearn to be: whose every poem is wholly inspired and uninterruptedly high in intensity. Now if Dowd had made poems instead of horse radish, he would have made "The Tyger" and "The Sick Rose," or "The Windhover" and "Hurrahing in Harvest." He wouldn't have had to fill up the less prominent parts, for the poems wouldn't have had any — unlike the products of us poor working poet-stiffs who don't often live at a pitch near madness and who can't manage more than a prominent line or two.

As the title and the proverb may indicate, John Dowd, in his insistence on quality, is a vanishing kind of American. That's the main theme: devotion to excellence. But there are further themes to find, if the reader wants to. Literally, Dowd lost his eyesight from staring at the horse radish roots within his grinder; but he also stared at Death, that lethal vegetable. (Rereading the poem, I imagine Dowd's Death as some hideous fume-surrounded personification of the Spirit of Horse Radish. But you don't have to imagine that.) An ordinary man, Dowd foresaw his death and still continued working, feeding his kids and obtaining snowsuits for them, and by doing so, he attained a bit of tragic dignity. As some Yiddish writer once said, there are people who deserve a medal just for getting up in the morning. Blind though Dowd became, yet he saw more clearly than some who see — those "other guys," those merchants of the shoddy. (I don't regard us inferior poets who must fill up the less prominent parts as being such slippery operators. We're doing the best we can. We don't write any "Windhovvers," but at least we aren't trying to gyp the consumer.) Those "other guys" die from car crashes, say, or from mixing pills with their drinks. Unlike Dowd, they don't ply their trades in despite of the universe. Their deaths, like their lives, are strictly run-of-the-mill — just so much adulterated horse radish.

CONSUMER'S REPORT

They don't make things like they used to.

American proverb

At meat, or hearing you deplore
How soon things break, my mind salutes
John Dowd, who brought by rolling store
Horse radish to our kitchen door
He'd make from cream and home-ground roots.

My God! the heat of it would burn
Right through your beef and knock your tongue out.
Once for a snowsuit I'd outgrown
Came so much free stuff in return
It smoldered down and ended flung out.

Why did he wear that look of pain,
Strangely although his trade kept thriving?
They said the fumes get to your brain.
One day he came back with a cane
And someone else to do the driving,

But ground right on with open eyes
And, grinding, stared straight at his killer.
I bet theirs took them by surprise
Though they could see, those other guys,
The guys who used white turnip filler.

MOST OF MY DISEMBARKMENTS

Most of my disembarkments
were possibly flawless,
graceful as the best music, graceful
as the pianist's ten fingers
who are all separate bodies
and lives. But even in my little finger
there was no kindness

so I decided to start again.
I started again and still
there was no kindness so
I decided to explore a single theme,
a theme I have never admired
except at the distance
from which I admire and admit

the number of breaths taken each day
in our considerable contests
of breathing. . . . Faithfully, night
and her chilled closet arrives,
and inside — this theme
in its nether language:
There are too many lost.

Here's the list:

MAN ASLEEP IN THE DESERT

He's the man — we all recognize
him — he's the man
in the desert who sees a mirage

of a frozen lake whose skaters glide
across its cold thirstless face.
On the warmer side of a dune

he reclines and pulls the palest sheet
up to his chin and sleeps, fitfully,
as only he deserves.

He dreams: Love as a tool,
love as a bribe.
He dreams: X, X, X, X, and he interprets this

as the particular zones of passion
he does not remember.
The moonlight, like a blue welt

of indignance, doesn't disturb him.
In this sleep he nods towards
the curved leaf of calm

and his pulse slows its vital imaginings. . . .
There is only one flaw in the window
of his sleep: nothing on the other side.

PAST TENSE

When I was barely human nobody loved me.
Ditto the other way around.

I was convinced the wrong arms
had been placed on my body

just as I was convinced
only a coward tongues

the broken spine of his king.
My personality was as animated

as an empty shelf and even
my lapses were common. Therefore,

in the past tense, I bang my cup
against the bars of this cell

in disgust, of course, but mainly
because of the sound it makes.

THE ANGEL'S TEETHMARKS

(Jean)

My thirst is no longer simple: whatever
I swallow must
be permanent. I want (maybe

I should fill in the next blank with optimism)
something pure — possibly abstract —
but pure as the blood of a trout.

I love the inevitable: when I find the teethmarks
of an angel on my shoulder I swoon,
automatically. I don't deserve such bliss
in this arena of continual aches
and occasional glee. And, I'd be a fool

if I weren't delighted with her hair
like a swimmer on the pillow
attempting to reach dawn. . . .

DANCE AND SWIM

for John Mahnke

Like dancers in a dull
and cool aquarium

angels lave their way across
the dancefloor. They swim

on the opposite sides
of their sidestrokes.

And their crawlstrokes:
there is no better ballet. . . .

— Who does not dance
does not abandon

footprints on the belly
of our graceless orb.

— Who does not swim knows
this contradiction of breathing

and not breathing, or: his or her,
the dancer's, his or her

inexplicable, calm,
and choreographed glances

towards a particular NO.
It means: we will not touch

the dancers, and their dance
will not touch us, finally. . . .

BARRETT & BROWNING

Mr Browning helped but I think poetry
and hatred
for her father made Miss Barrett decide
to live. I think

I believe this dire couple.
And for once I believe
scholars: *they loved each other.*

Elizabeth, of course, was smarter.
Robert, in the beginning, more ardent.
He was positive

and if his main inventions
were in a field
other than verse
he would have invented the wheelchair

and pushed her
relentlessly south and warmer.
I'm sure this was one reason why
she got up and walked alone. . . .

Love helped, though, and they did
love each other — bearing
one healthy but dull child
and many healthy poems,
which was probably not enough. . . .

HERE'S TO SAMUEL GREENBERG

Here's to Samuel Greenberg
who died of bum lungs, age 23,
in 1916, penniless, leaving
only a few notebooks
as a gift to Hart Crane
who died of bum lungs (i.e. filled
with water), age 33, in 1932.
Here's to you, Samuel — semi-illiterate
coughing it out among total
illiterates during the only time
in your life you had time
to write: on your back,
on a cot, on Ward Island
preparing nearly inaudible gifts
of language, which were used,
as collaboration, in a few lines,
in a few poems by Hart
Crane — who had a little
more time to sing through his mouth.
Here's to you, Samuel Greenberg,
small master, and here's to your bones
which glow and are sliding
beneath the earth, with the earth. . . .

POE'S HOUSE

New York

And Poe's house? What about Poe's house? Where's Poe's house?

The young shrug their shoulders. A kind little old lady whispers to me:

Yes, a tiny white house. Yes, yes, I've heard of it. And you want me to tell you where it is? But her memory's shot and can't walk straight. No one leads the way. We go towards where they half tell us, but never find it. It is, perhaps, a butterfly.

Nevertheless, it does exist in New York, as an image exists in the memory, a tiny memory of a star or of jasmine that can't be placed except where jasmine grows or in the sky before we were born, the sky of childhood, of nightmare, of daydreams and sickness.

Nevertheless, I see it, I have seen it on a street, moonlight on its tiny white wood front, ivy the color of snow climbing its closed door, in front of which the dead lie, covered with snow that hasn't been stepped on, like three pure pillows, three steps that, one day, led up to it.

translated by Sandra Hoben

JOSEPH

Joseph, you were always in the background turning red. Thumbs and fingers swollen from hammerslips, the boss chuckling in the corner. Everything you made blistered, when that angel came you bit off part of your tongue. Found Mary at the well

wailing, swami right there in the dust. Mary, you said off the bat, don't worry we don't have to be that way. I'll build a roof over your head, protect you from Roman fire, floods and drought, name it. Nights I'll lie at your feet, say Yes!

Well she'd seen the same angel, thought twice. Then again. Why *not* let this funny man build a house? Nice. Modest. Nothing quite fit. No door, but this Arimathean at her feet, dreaming nails and boards. Sandpaper! She needed a bed.

It didn't stop there, he built drawers for her veils, cabinets for spices. One ladder to climb on the roof, one for climbing down.

Then his breath on her ankles! She wrote St. Anne, mother but he's close to my knees. Please advise. The return post said About time and Joseph built a clock in honor. Five minutes fast. Mary threw up her hands at the dining room set.

Joseph, you're on the wrong side of the altar. Left. Brides leave their bouquets by Mary, virgins pray to her, not you. They don't want to step

over stools, go through a patron of basements. And attics.

Mary's got angels at her elbows, leaning over the baby,
double halo. You're by the ox, a hammer in your
belt, nails flashing wrong side out of that smile.

BABE RUTH POINTING

When Babe Ruth points, the whole table stops eating. What is it, Babe. Mustard? Salt? Mrs. Ruth says Pass Babe the salt.

No. Not salt. Babe Ruth, the Sultan of Swat, stands up in his retired Yankee pinstripes, and points. Mrs. Ruth is on her feet, Please Babe, what. The window? The street? There's nothing in the street.

George Herman Ruth, Bambino Babe, ignores her; he lifts his frenchbread at arm's length and points. His cap sits low on his bulldog head; his cleats dig automatically into the linoleum.

Nova Scotia says Babe. It was always Nova Scotia, always.

Eventually the Babe slumps back to his chair, embarrassed silence around the table. A nice place, pipes Mrs. Ruth, Nova Scotia. Mountains, rivers, the ocean, I'm sure it's just delightful, Babe —

The Babe leans over to me. Nova Scotia, he says, is the cat's ass.

THE MAN WHO BUYS HIDES

before I had a face
my mother supposed another
horizon aligned with that

wrong one contemporary hands fit
to relic Sioux. maybe town
behind the long
hills her brother's feed lot rode.
she was unmarried & wished

my face would never ripen
on the small stone memory left
of a necessary
lover. but I was born

white. & grew, bulky
& slow, never hearing my name
knotted in her tongue though
she must have sung

kneading father's pale
flesh, face to face drinking
distortion from each ripple
the other's body made.
or so I thought
when at night her lost
voice sounded the walls to the service
porch where at fourteen I dreamed
one pool dropping

to another hatchery trout threaded.
on the wall overhead
an exhausted

Jesus dried in milky shellac

showing rain.

* * * *

summers I answered
her face surfacing in the bedroom
window to clean her eyes

or devotedly follow a crippled
hand through the word
“drink.” my denim printed
blue sweat wherever I leaned
in her unquenchable

shadow. winters the ragged sky
my eyes folded as I slept
lost snow. the world formed under

our stamping feet & above it
breath drifted. with bare
hands uncle & I
shaped the cattle’s frozen
noses, undid the ice their drool
tied through whatever
they ate. only the radio

spoke other names
when the lights were out
& eyes were adrift in their own

local winter.

* * * *

forty years later never thinking
of Dakota I still go faceless
into sleep & dream myself

intaglio under the animal.
I never see the driver
of my truck as it weaves the dead
smells through eucalyptus rows
swerving for potholes

in the gravel till the bones
give & under the tarp
the burst organs suck & squeeze.
what is death?
at the tail-end they put one drain

at the other they put
the tongue back in, intractable
& too big
what can the doctor say

who is tired of his own body?

* * * *

the poplar leaves go on multiplying
basic July. July sun
is swollen in the basin

where I cool
my drunken face. once I loved

my smell as I loved the hoof tipped
with stink trailing from the stud

barn. I have become a talker
in bars who wanted
to be only a handspan of red
earth trembling with ants.
Dakota stays under the washed
face even if Calif
turns it dark. only man is dumb

whose tongue shapes before the fingers
know. did these dead
animals talk
with hooves or with tactile
fetlocks praise
the grass as they stepped

off the limits of their hunger,
touching with their mouths
last? as I load each distended

body the winch
squeals, the cable cuts new
boundaries across
a piebald hide. only the head
drags & the eyes roll

over, counter to the earth.

HILLSIDE NIGHT-SHED

1

It's a phantom dwelling.

So whether it stands on a hill,

Or stands on an absence

Of hill, where the sky shifts

And glistens in mountain-shape,

Is like asking

The address of a jeweller's shop

That sells only black pearls.

Then is it a shed or shack,

An old warehouse or windmill,

Or is it the empty mansion

Where the moon floats

Dressed in robes like a duchess?

The belts of dusk circle sidewalks,

Blur the planet, saying it's hard to tell,

Hard to tell . . .

2

Everywhere, nowhere.

Viewed through the keyhole of an owl's

Talons, it's the blue, invisible frame

Falling with nightfall. Or see it

As the spyglass pulled from a handkerchief,
The wood-dove from the hat, the stage set

For the play children write
When, riding by on

Bicycles, they shout
Into its rooms without knowing.

Now's the time. Walk in.
Feel the walls that tremble.

3

Take the kept, stiff legs of a stork,
Bathe in marsh, mist, and cloud,

Then dress with tunic of crow feathers.
For hands, wax wings of a bat.

Dial a prayer, dial a maker.
Make the sun into a stitched

And hagridden thing. A crizzled
Pumpkin for the head. Now hang this

From the highest branch.
Bring night, bring sleep,

Bring for the eyes a bud of ether.
Chant, and then chant again

Until part of this
Becomes the mystery.

So is it there, in the stars'
Penmanship lighting up,

In a simpleness that's ashen
Awakening in the shadows,

In the sighing of the leaves
Around the dry mouths of the dead?

One never knows. It may be only a style
Of dust, rigged up by the wind.

Yet as twilight oils the stone,
A wand is in the mummer's hand,

Frost in the dew, and the pearl
Eye of the thunder-drum

Sets the bones of the face, *your face*,
Peering in through a window.

TAPWATER

You live where the sounds of trucks
come through the open window,
packers bringing carcasses at night.
All this time on the side of the market
hang, like eclipses, six round lamps.

But once you went into song, went
into dance, when the rock of night
was lifted, before you thought of all
the things a rock could do to you,
on its own.

Out on the beach the mussels caught
at it, what you overturned;
the crabs scattered, running
with one glance
at some horrible maturity.

You pray to the bird in your hands
that you will never wake again
to the dilemma, or wake without
breath, or without the familiar town,
or without the others.

HOUSE IS AN ENIGMA

House is an enigma. It directs what is near
and what is far away. Under the north wind,
under the hill, the broad bay is dark blue-cold.
The cold does not matter. The whitecaps are heavy
and heavily wrapped, under the wind
in a pauper whiteness, deceptive brides
one by one drowned and pulled under.

The gull was born to a task — sorting
the park and the houses from his eye, from the air;
there is no secret. Some whitecaps
reach the rocks. They thought rocks were safety.
They pound for the railroad; they reach no railroad,
no hill, no high peace on land.

*But no, do not run, though you have
no instinct and small reason to be proud.
The ashes are cold and the image
is image no longer.*

House alleys are rutted and glorified
by wild grasses, wild plants, California Poppies.
Afternoons, mornings, behind cement-blocked
walls, the walls fluted for light and pattern
cling the vines. Garage doors are heavy wooden burdens.
The young trees, the sweet peas, the Hubbard Squashes
are no burden. The rest is fence. Garbage cans.
Cats. Dogs. The great memory of the torn-away
raspberry jumble. And the cynical gravel.

I have been a poet for a time
before I hear a pot at home setting down
without finality. The spoon taps the sides
and the television glows and speaks out

in a language it says has been shattered,
and a light goes on in me; somewhere, inside.

*But no, do not run though you have
no instinct and small reason to be proud.
The ashes are cold and the image
is image no longer.*

THE CANDLES DRAW WELL AFTER ALL

The candles draw well after all.
By night they might have been
flickering.
Tallow; wax and tallow;
the story is a circle and a band.
The unseen circles of air
make a silent story. So tells
the ring and the rowboat round the isle,
the zero and the handles of scissors.
So tells the circle swinging from the cord,
the noose of the windowshade.

The sun is passing
from the Atlantic to your day.
The sun has passed the eddies of rain
and is coming fast as a runner.
It is coming from a bath of rain
to its absence.

Sister braid, the skull
is not along today. Elemental word!
She is never ready for morning.
Reel up the little masquerade.
The summer will not be dreadful.

THE DAY OF THE DEAD

Gina has lit a candle for her dead.
She's lit it in the kitchen —
the dead are many, and they are far away.
We must think back to when she was a child
and her breakfast was a handful of dried chestnuts.
We must call forth a small and old father,
his ways of finding a drop or two of sweet wine.
Because there was only enough money to feed the pigs
she took to the fields,
there was no money for his wine,
his candy and nuts.
Among the dead we put the teacher
whose whip cut her frozen fingers as a child.
Dead too is someone who lives — some half-living —
down near the ferry. It's a crowd
and yet it's nothing —
she never took the pigs to the fields.

I lived on the third floor in those days
and from one end of a row of hedges
Galiffa, the little dog, could see me —
with great leaps off the winding staircase
he would come over to me. Now I can't remember
if he died in our house, if he was buried,
and if so, when and where. All I remember
is that leap and his bark,
just as little more remains of great loves
when they're not of despair and death.
But this wasn't the case with that little dog
with the long ears, who had a name
invented by the farmer's son
who was my age, illiterate and strangely
less alive than the dog that lives in my sleeplessness.

translated by Daniel Halpern and Jorie Graham

DEAD RECKONING

It's not a flaw
or anything you've ever touched this way
on the smooth globe,
this one spot in relief, in Scotland
on the North Sea.

It is a house.
The snow on its roof is filmy,
like moth dust,
too slight to be cold.
And the slate edge
of the chimney top is so fine
it even draws
a little of your blood, which settles
in the garden, caught
on the tips of thorns.

You lived here once
not choosing to
in winter, which was hard.
Now, to come to it again.
To have chosen to come to it again.

And you are caught in the garden,
suddenly small
among brambles. The chimney towers
above you, the smoke rises,
and unlike blood, which heals because it is warm,
the snow, leaning
against the lighted windows and thickening
on your skin, is very cold.

FALSE SUBJECTS

Wondrous the Gods more wondrous are the Men
More Wondrous Wondrous still the Cock & Hen

William Blake

The sea for one, the oily promoter, a caption
for itself blown larger than itself.

And the irksome meddling with parents
who live quietly, now, without us.

And our own conventional, shopworn bodies,
arks of misinformation, bald lies.

Even to think of them, to name them,
provokes a shudder urging think again!

Crabs in a coffee can are true,
kept in a chest of drawers, stinking.

And the dignified restraint of Mother and Father,
saving it for privacy, was true enough.

And how true the cysts, the pale strips
of healed skin, pocks, pores, and the bitter eyes.

How exactly the mica bit of wing evokes
the fly, and the fly the loop of shit.

The sea gloms onto the earth, in the distance.
Our parents are such mammoths, impossible.

And our bodies — sleep, dream, they are useless.
But salt, a closed door, a wart

are particles, particulars, single notes suggesting
single notes, our true and lasting concerns.

MEANINGS OF POETRY

a talk given at the Maison de la Culture
at Thonon, 1967

At the invitation of the Tel Quel group, my friend Francis Ponge gave a fine, long talk about poetry, and, using a perfectly concrete example, attempted to explain the meaning of poetry.

He said this: "You are on the main street of a big city. Newspapers hot from the presses have just arrived on the stands. An important piece of news has broken: let's say, as was the case not long ago, the assassination of a great head of State. You rush up to buy some daily paper, caught up as you are in the news and a powerful desire to know more about it. If at the same moment you take hold of the paper you don't smell (as powerfully as you felt the desire to get hold of the newspaper), if you aren't conscious at the same time of the smell of fresh printer's ink and also that, above you, of the leaves, then you don't feel the thing we call poetry." Thus Francis Ponge substantially spoke.

This being granted, the variety of forms written poetry takes is a fortunate thing. Traditional forms may be as valid as those freely composed. I do not like the expression "free verse" which may be equivocal. A poem, even if it does not conform to traditional poetry, is composed according to rules and forms which allow it to exist.

Without being overly systematic, it can be said that two forms of poetry exist, two extremes, that is, all intermediate forms can be found between them. This would mean, on one hand, the poetry of effusion, and on the other, the poetry of concentration. The latter tends to a great economy of means. It expresses itself through a concentrated use of words. The poetry of effusion will more readily tend to use a fast flow of words, it will attain certain bright flashes and reflections, certain touches of expression that would not have come to light without its prolixity.

The poem can be generated by a vocable in common use and suddenly perceived gorged with all its meaning, surrounded by a sort of magnetic aura. It can also be generated by the sight of a simple object, never before seen in such a way, bearer of all its significative values and touching off the poem. The object thus seen appears in its complicity with the rest of the universe and situated in that universe.

Much is said about the use of images in poetry. It is certain that in the broad sense of the term, all poetry contains images. In the narrower sense, many poems contain similes and metaphors. Numerous poets today and in the past have given us admirable examples. As far as I am concerned, I have come to the point of writing almost none at all. Perhaps because simile and metaphor imply comparison, and I can compare no one thing to any other in this multifarious universe nonetheless full of mysterious affinities between all things. I have sometimes felt, charmed by other poets' metaphors and similes, that I wanted to write my own, did and found them satisfactory, then disowned them all the next day upon realizing they are simply not me. But from time to time I may save one of them.

This brings me to speak about the maturation of a poem. It is certainly possible for a poem to come out exactly right on the first draft. For me, at least, that remains the exception. When a poem I have conceived and written does not manage to hold together, to find home, to exist, I file it away only to return to it after several months, even years. Then, sometimes thanks to a single word removed or added, the poem begins to hold together. That is precisely why Max Jacob wrote me one day, during his first stay at Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire: "Poetry needs to age like wine in a cellar."

There are curious connections between the poet's art and that of the painter. I may say to myself, looking at a text: I need some red there, or some gray or other; but of course I don't get my red by putting some red thing in my text, but, for example, by adding a pronoun or some syllable of a word which, for me, is a stroke of red.

I do not think we should, as we have had too great a tendency to, make poetry too sacred, try too hard to establish its relation to mysticism. Certainly, there are a few examples of great mystics who were also great poets. Witness St. John of the Cross. On the other hand, a woman whose mystical experience was extraordinary, St. Therese of the Child of Jesus of Lisieux, wrote poems that were sincere and deeply felt but flat, showing no gift for poetry.

Alongside mystical knowledge, it is possible that a certain poetic knowledge exists, enabling us more than anything else to grasp certain of the world's givens and coordinates. This is what Bergson grasped fully, especially when he asserted that poets explain Time better than philosophers.

As Mallarmé said to Degas, poetry is not made of ideas, but of words; in any case, poetry is made, he stated, to "Give the tribe's words back their full and the purest meaning, their true weight and all their freshness." Meaning the poet must, unless consciously rejuvenating one, disdain clichés, evidence that a vocable is wearing out. "You settle for little or nothing," said Francis Ponge, "if to express grandeur you simply use the word grandeur."

As for myself, I would rather see muted brilliance than too much brilliance in poetry. Jean Cocteau expressed the same thing by saying he liked the wrong side of certain bright colored silk ties, full of attenuated brilliance and subtle iridescence, better than the right side of the same ties.

The poet must not succumb to what Jean Paulhan has called literary terror. This would make him shy away from certain simplicities of style and artificially refine his writing. I point out in passing that Maurice Garçon, in his reply given at Paulhan's Académie Française inauguration, made a great mistake in suggesting Paulhan promoted this terror, while in fact he denounced it.

What is essential in poetry is an absence of vagueness as well as of stiffness in writing. Lines of Racine's impeccably obey the strictest rules, and take no liberties, yet there is a

certain deliberate awkwardness in the play of syllables that contributes to their great poetic worth.

It appears that poetry eminently linked to the beauty of the universe is assured of perennial existence. Poetry tries desperately to free this beauty and all the ineffable, even the tragic, it keeps in the context of the World.

Poetry also tries to rediscover a certain innocence of the world which is not illusion but profound truth, and which subsists through and in the face of everything, and despite all of history's diabolical tricks.

translated by Mary Feeney

ONE AND THE SAME

A crow spends the night
on a column
the earth
dons its primroses
someone delicately breaks
the shell of an egg
with no apprehension of death.
One and the same
hears a woman adream
her head on the hem of the sheet.

FUNERAL PROCESSIONS

In the long clear days
of a life of hopes and cries
he watches women dream.
Bells ring
the route is a long one
says the procession leader.
One hand on the back of the chair
the other buttons a black vest
countrysides show their thatch
their bluebells their roses
the graves chained off in iron
on fine days time stands dead still.
Beneath the flight of crows
each minute is resplendent.

translated by Mary Feeney

COLOR OF SEPIA

In a ruined time
one searches
for a searing language
that's torn
fragmented.
Linen over the forearm
a waiter stands
at the door of a run-down
café
color of sepia.

MOMENT OF A WORLD

A village the fumes
soldiers spearing geese
on the square
from there strong trees
climb without stopping
in the future
the same flickering
only stronger the gloved hand
poised on the table
a recluse
who almost never speaks.

IN A DOWNPOUR

In some uncertain age
next to an English hearth
scrubbed down to its terracotta tile
a glass of water rests
in the palm of an old man
his eyes keep
their mist of tenderness
the rain veils
the persistent walls
the gleaming roofs.

THE POSE

Not far from rubble
the plants let seeds go
under oncoming clouds
a woman in a vast dress
a man in a black suit
pose in the hour of full sun
someone's taking their picture
their pleasing memories
to be more lasting
the breeze hardly moves
on their grey hair
their stiff clothes.

THE OCEAN

Not one word of truth
says the man
who's just been reading
a scrap of newspaper
three days old
picked off the ground
a large woman
turns into the alley
beautiful he thinks
until avoiding
her large dark eyes
one hears the ocean
beating against bare rocks.

OBSCURE TRANSPARENCE

A table stands shakily
a wind from the east
blows a floating paper
covered with illegible writing.
Chest held in
a woman stands
tightly wrapped in wool
completely covered
except for her face.
Time's obscure
transparency today
watches over hope on the islands
their thin flowers.

TOY

The neon shining on the plants
the haggard fruit the black
receiver of the telephone
are excluded from another floor
where there's a heavy man
at his feet a fallen toy
a miniature horseman with broken legs
showing the fragile brown dough
from which it was formed
outside
the snow darkens
under the running clouds.

translated by Richard Kent and Peter Schmidt

LOOKING FOR YOU

Looking for you through the gray rain,
your whole house is a face, windows
for eyes, door for a mouth. Chimney
breathing, your house waits. You
come down the street: you get a stare,
straight and slow to change.

No matter how willing and weak your own
face is, you know another face
for you, somewhere in the world: your house,
or a stone you choose on a mountain, or even
the wrinkled sea and its friend the wind.

Far away on an island off Alaska
there's a village gone back to forest,
and there leaning and peering — totem poles,
gray cedar eyes, crest, beak:
all those faces at home, staring from shadows,

Looking for you through the gray rain.

MIRACLES

Remember waking up, the clouds of your feet,
sharp day out there, a claw, your life
dimmer than its own shadow: you forget
for a minute house, trees, the world.
Then your eyes plunder around again
where all the miracles move: you snap
quietly on — it is morning, you are alive;
and those friends you were talking to, those
mistakes you were sorry for — they fade.
You are awake somewhere in the sky.

NO TIME TO LOSE

You have no time to lose.
The unfamiliar woman across from you
thinks: he's old.
We grew up. We changed,
we've been sleeping badly for a long time
or in an automatic way.
The world doesn't get any clearer
while you work a music box.
A crash course in Marxism,
the meal you bolt, love
in a second-class train berth, quick,
won't change the condition
of the veins in your temple.
Sometimes waiting is nice.
A door opens
and everything's different.

WHEN THINGS TURN GREEN

Anyone can call into the woods
or let old love letters spoil in the rain
at just the right moment,
dump the second car somewhere, forever —
and take a false name
like an abandoned child.
You'd like to put that down
to spring.
But it happens too fast.
The revolution's begun,
the leaves breathe too hurriedly,
nobody protests the development
of the subconscious,
street numbers disappear overnight.
It's hard to find anyone
who knows his way around.

translated by Stuart Frieibert

HOMING

1.

Tracking deep signals given off
by the pronoun *I*, my feet
chew into the valley by switchback.
Stone air, empty of birds. An arctic cony,
silvery forelegs combing out his rich
moustache of dwarf clover
for drying on rocks. At a bend
the prospect clears through aspen;
pale bodystocking bark, lucent swivels
of leaf. To show nervous cloud fuming
the divide's raw edge — and one huge
conifer valley swathing miles
towards Bierstadt moraine. Austere cirques
at its end, risen high, barren,
beyond. These solitudes we must lose
in order to enter them.

2.

Not a single blue thread unravelling
a campfire. Last winter's faint roar.
Down again, following knuckled trail
past Cenozoic grimaces barely stopped short
of intelligence, but walking
amongst ourselves, homing
on forested inscape. Their breath
at the tip of the ear: "Never.
No one. None."

3.

Muskrat entrails, spilt. A swipe
of visceral glue over alpine flowers
yellower than forsythia. Meaning mountain cat
on the prod? Blossoming out into space
this magnificently still, I imagine
maybe nothing can leave; imagine a hand
all pelt and claw, grazing these 3-week shadows
of seeds. Fast shadow grazes my face,
its light plane a droning, final machine
growing distant as a wren's eye.
Then after. The start of a silence
so immeasurable I lounge pine straw
pacing it off; staying put,
just taking its length.

4.

The sun blurts up again, again —
spinning B-B in a can. Chipmunks,
otter, marmots, creep towards me
from the underbrush hackles
of grey timberwolf logs
as if towards a stream: nosing around,
expecting I'll join. Stands
of Engleman spruce rise, improvise,
and die. August stars turn in this wind
strumming a ribcage whose body
is learning to wear articulate moons
on its sleeve; and October frosts arrive,
surrounding filaments of each eyelash
like the velvet antennae of deer.
Nights, I dream small fires
shut up in stones, and sunsets

of navigable rock flying off as vast
cavernous birds
into the same bronze egg.

5.

With lichen seeping across my forehead
mapping ignorant countries
that want to be leaves, I become visits
of transparent ants, their dew
nudging last flecks of cell
to twist out of roots, unfurl,
then rappel by umbilical cord
back into earth. My stare,
little hammers of black light nagging
passer-by planets to see themselves
as they are: revolutions
of slate replacing a name once bitten
by rainbows. And all desire, all despair —
these two skyline monoliths jutting the rim
of glacial cirque. A pair of monks who look on
sitting quietly together, reading,
even humming, the one book.

TALKING BACK: A DREAM

We always said we would.
10 in line. The basketball coach on my right
dribbles a poem made up of periods strung
like ticks in a clock. Another, a girl,
is saying "Goodbye EKG."
All of us writing farewells to our deaths.
They flow onto the page, not bad not good.
After, they'll wire our skulls for twitch.
Nobody cancels a line.

Through rooms my going empties behind
I handle the first knob as if it were always the last.
A .22 is small but the feel is final.
They mean it, they'll finish us off.
Headlong through the window's a choice
that doesn't occur. I imagine the splash.
Down the row of heads towards me, little bursts
of *coup de grâce*, like stapling reports.
This isn't deciding, it's force.

Their grove of legs around me, and talk.
A blip of lead in the brain. I lie
very still, at the focus
of nothing. Daylight, blue trees, and time
like snow. This hive of life, these cells.
Something's told them I'm close.
The mind's a child, using the edge
as a club. Hasn't the body
rights of its own? Poor thing,
I pity it. Talking back, trying to reason
through dream. And the hearse doors opening
wide on each side, like wings.

A BLUE GLASS JAR

A sunset like a total word.
Minutes after, the west
quiet as a shadow whose barn
has swallowed doves.

Ripe cottonwood leaves
flashing the last of the clouds
and first stars, dim
as insect wings.

The ants, pushing our dust around.

In one of my lives, surely,
I'll remember a blue
glass jar
that swims as it walks, keeping
a half dozen fireflies
surrounded.

MADONNA

The one who'd seen it all turned her face away. She was proud, made prouder. The mother sitting up in bed, holding her baby like a cocoon to the sun's last rays.

Just then the nurse brought a dark, swollen breast to the infant's lips. But he was asleep, caring nothing for the sun, the mystery of a first kiss.

A demanding person might complain about a fleshy tone in the tile floor, the window's triangle of sky should be more blue, more like the sky.

And not just that — the child, center of attention, crying so strangely, the soles of his feet together like a monkey!

The architecture clean, but nothing new — part temple, part market. Stairs that lead nowhere, windows drowning, breathing in darkness, tomblike arches, empty benches, curtains knotted in anger.

And then, cutting across time, the procession of women with the virtues and secrets of their shoulders. They're all there. The one whose belly shone like a loaf of hard, white bread beneath her shroud. The mother with a child behind her full, comforting hip, protecting himself from the miracle. The married woman with the childish braid and the conspicuously mature breasts. And among them, but standing apart, the virgin: wise as a grandmother, with powerful arms, at the window lost in thought.

Her back to the scene, the gravest, the sweetest of all. The strange child in her arms, she seems to know everything. Love in her rolling eyes, blindness and light in the boy's plump face.

And in the background, fleeing, an old man climbs painfully up the stairs. At the top stands a woman, beautifully dressed, ready to help him gently through the right door.

translated by Martha Moody

LOOKING AT YOUR FACE

Looking at your face
now you have become ready to die,
is like kneeling at an old gravestone
on an afternoon without sun, trying to read
in the white stone the white chiselings of the poem.

THE HEN BROODING

She daydreams, like all mothers.
She dreams her children will be born again
as great birds that can open their wings and soar —
though she herself is to wander
the old paths on earth, eating the stones and grains.
Of such broodings: the gold and the invisibility
of everything.

THE CHEMIST AND HIS DAUGHTER

Up here, the bottles shine.
Starved for a grain of sleep,
I squint at labels,
hand-written labels, her work.
This bathrobe used to fit;
now I hardly find my hands.
She says my soul takes up the room.
Women, with their mollifying lies.

This will be my heaven, these shelves
of scales and weights and pills.
Damn her,
she knows I'm fumbling with the lids.
And damn my caliper hands,
the bones have curved.
There she goes, half dark with her drink,
out onto the lawn.
She'll call to me, or to the window.
Always repeats herself.
Something about a birthday,
I don't remember.
Women, with their anniversaries.

I want to sleep. Music from her party
might make me dream.
I could dance the ladies round,
except for the dizziness.

She's on the stairs.

Sometimes she shines like Christmas night,
that girl, yellow and talkative.
And sometimes dark, enclosed,
and serious, like medicine,
she'll come to my bedside
with news, a blanket, or a tray,
or the minerals I take to stave off colds.

CONTRIBUTORS

MARVIN BELL will have a new collection, **Stars Which See, Stars Which Do Not See**, from Atheneum early in 1977.

JEAN FOLLAIN (1903-1971) was born in Normandy. He lived in Paris most of his life, where he was a lawyer and judge as well as a poet. W. S. Merwin has translated a selection of his poems, **Transparence of the World** (Atheneum, 1969), and he is represented in the new anthology by Charles Simic and Mark Strand, **Another Republic** (Ecco). About the translators: MARY FEENEY lives in Paris, and has translated Follain's prose poems, with William Mathews (see FIELD 11); RICHARD KENT is mentioned below; PETER SCHMIDT is a graduate student at the University of Virginia. About the essay, Mary writes: "I have tried to preserve Follain's stilted and personal prose style."

JAN HAAGENSEN lives on a farm in Enon Valley, Pennsylvania. She recently spent some time at Yaddo, and writes that she is currently looking for a teaching job.

This is MARK JARMAN's second appearance in FIELD. He is teaching this year at Indiana State University, Evansville.

LAURA JENSEN lives in Tacoma, Washington. Her book, **Anxiety and Ashes**, is now available from The Penumbra Press (Box 12, Lisbon, Iowa).

Though JUAN RAMON JIMÉNEZ (1881-1958) needs no introduction, his prose poems, so far as we have been able to determine, are practically unknown in English. His translator, SANDRA HOBEN, is in the writing program at the University of Utah.

MARILYN JOHNSON is currently studying in the writing program at the University of New Hampshire.

TIMOTHY KELLY, a fireballing northpaw, lives and gardens in Vermilion, Ohio. This is his first appearance in print.

X. J. KENNEDY lives in Bedford, Massachusetts, and teaches at Tufts. He notes that while the poem "Consumer's Report" has appeared in print in England (**Breaking and Entering**, Oxford U. Press, 1971), this is its first American publication.

RICHARD KENT is currently living and teaching in Taiwan. This is his first published poem.

One of our editors reports that GALWAY KINNELL's next book is rumored to be **Tennis for Poets: A Guide to Survival in America**. His most recent poems have appeared in **The New Yorker**.

KARL KROLOW, one of Germany's leading poets and a frequent contributor to FIELD, recently won the prestigious Rilke Prize.

THOMAS LUX's collection, **The Glassblower's Breath**, appeared last year from Cleveland State. He teaches at Sarah Lawrence.

The translations of EUGENIO MONTALE in this issue represent very recent work. They appeared originally in the Italian literary magazine, **Nuovi Argomenti**. The translators: JORIE GRAHAM attended the writing program at Columbia University last year; DANIEL HALPERN edited **The American Poetry Anthology** (Avon) and has a recent collection of poems, **Street Fire**, from Viking.

LANCE PATIGIAN lives on a farm outside Fresno, California. He has studied with Philip Levine and Robert Mezey.

STANLEY PLUMLY's poems in this issue are from his new book, **Out-of-the-Body Travel**, to be published in the spring by Ecco Press. He is teaching this year at Princeton.

REG SANER, author of **Climbing Into the Roots** (Harper & Row) and winner of the Whitman Award, lives in Boulder, Colorado, where he teaches at Colorado University. "As for news," he writes, "deer have eaten my corn, my crabtree saplings, my wife's basket-of-gold. So far they've not nibbled the petunias, nor the tomatoes. You see by these losses that taming the West is no joke."

DENNIS SCHMITZ, author of **Goodwill, Inc.** (Ecco), lives and teaches in Sacramento, California.

WILLIAM STAFFORD continues to teach at Lewis and Clark and to travel the country from Florida to Alaska, "lugging some poems and spreading the word." He has just published a small book, **Braided Apart**, which intersperses poems by two Staffords, William and Kim, as well as photographs by the latter.

ALFONSINA STORNI was born in Switzerland in 1892. As a small child she was taken to Argentina, where she subsequently became a citizen. Supporting herself as a teacher, milliner, and advertising-copy writer, she published eight books of poems and left a body of unedited work. "They've Come" is from Storni's fourth book, **Languidez**, published in 1920. Incurably ill with cancer, Storni killed herself in 1938. Her translator, MARTHA MOODY, who also did the poem by BLANCA VARELA in this issue, is a student at Oberlin College. She was helped in her work by Nora Wieser, Associate Professor of Spanish at Oberlin. Last January Nora and Martha — thanks to grants from Oberlin College — travelled through South America interviewing women poets. Nora is now at work on an anthology of Latin American women poets.

CHASE TWICHELL is presently working as a book binder in up-state New York, while plotting a move to Western Massachusetts.

BLANCA VARELA lives in Lima, Peru, and directs that city's **Fondo de Cultura Economica** bookstore. She has published three books of poems; "Madonna" is from the second, **Luz de Dia**.

